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## Editorial

# Planning issues in the Middle East, an introduction

Growth controls are extremely important in places where the amount of land that is suitable for development is limited. In such cases, population and urban growth are crucial issues that significantly affect physical development.

After World War II, many countries faced real planning problems which were full of challenges, opportunities and flaws (Hartog, 1999). Consequently, the affected countries, particularly in the developing world, tried to establish comprehensive, long-run plans as well as national spatial development strategies and related urban policies to overcome these problems. As a result of this form of institutional development, not surprisingly countries in the 21st century are enigmatic hybrids of state and local government.

Urban development strategies for regional urban conglomerations, metropolises, and cities have not been created effortlessly, but have been accompanied by many problems and obstacles. As a cause and a consequence of social change, human migration is regarded as one of the most important factors affecting the demographic and socioeconomic composition of the regions (Anjomani, 2002). Rapid urban development varies significantly in terms of its rate and socio-economic impact. The structure and growth propensities of regions and cities are mainly determined by the socio-economic and spatial development strategies followed by the nations in which they exist, affected in many cases by the historical role of cities and regions. Too frequently, economic development and growth has been seen as a solution to the urban crisis, submerging the need for resource redistribution policies.

The change in the nature and role of cities and regions in development has been very rapid. The rapid urbanization process, accelerated by the exponential growth and polarization of economic opportunities, has been re-enforced by changes in social behaviour, use of modern technology and rapid growth of modern means of transportation and communications. These growth processes have influenced the structure and functional linkage patterns of regions and cities producing grassroots development opportunities. Growth is a complicated phenomenon.

Urban problems in today's world are the result of many factors. As a result, the call for *national spatial development strategies and urban policies* must be based on a comprehensive understanding of the urbanization process and its structural and behavioural impacts; the changing pattern in the form and structure of regions and cities; and the design and capabilities of urban institutions to manage urban problems and optimise urban development opportunities.

It is necessary to accept that future development should be based on a sustainable development strategy by balancing economic efficiency, social justice and environmental liveability. An approach to development which integrates the spatial and sectoral dimensions of national development within a co-coordinated institutional framework could be the basis of such a

national spatial development strategy and urban policy. Within such an approach, which is primarily built on a sustainable development strategy, the interaction of demand and supply processes of national resources could be the basis of determining and answering crucial questions, such as: (1) How the demand of urban labor could be managed? (2) How the supply and demand for urban land could be balanced? (3) How to provide physical and social infrastructure efficiently? (4) How to make the cities competitive? and (5) How to increase the quality of life and levels of living of its citizens?

One of the main goals of a national spatial development strategy and related urban policy could be to increase the efficiency of urban areas through interventions that increase the utilization of the physical stock of capital, lower the cost of production and to increase the private sector participation in the provision and maintenance of infrastructure.

This special issue of *Habitat International* on Planning Issues in the Middle East is designed to discuss and analyze these problems from a regional perspective yet within the global experience of practice. The papers included in this collection establish the necessary theoretical and empirical research frameworks to facilitate such an analysis.

In the first two papers of this collection, Yasser Mahgoub, in his paper entitled 'Globalization and the Build Environment in Kuwait', and Mustapha Ben Hamouche, in his paper 'The Changing Morphology of the Gulf Cities in the Age of Globalization: The Case of Bahrain', demonstrate the change, within the region, caused by globalization and an increase in outside influences, is taking place at an incredible rate. Whereas, Mahgoub focuses primarily on the architectural results of this change, Ben Hamouche concentrates his analysis on the transformations in the structure of the city.

As a result of this period of enormous change in urban structure and form, there have been different reactions. Although adjustment to change is difficult, particularly within traditional societies, change has occurred nevertheless. Some change has been directly the result of action by local populations, as outlined by Ahmad Al-Zoabi in his paper 'The Residents' 'Images of the Past' in the Architecture of Salt City, Jordan'.

In other cases, the reaction has been from those responsible for urban management. This attempt to control development is well illustrated in three papers on the situation in the rapidly-growing city of Riyadh. In the first, Faisal Mubarak's paper entitled 'Urban Growth Boundary Policy and Residential Suburbanization: Riyadh, Saudi Arabia', while establishing a framework for subsequent analysis, raises questions concerning the policies used to control the development of the city. In the second of the three Riyadh papers, Shaibu Bala Garba in his paper 'Managing Urban Growth and Development in the Riyadh Metropolitan Area, Saudi Arabia', traces through the policy interventions that have been applied in the city concluding that they have been positive and of benefit in the growth of the city. In the final paper on Riyadh, Saleh Al-Hathloul and Muhammad Aslam Mughal, in their paper entitled 'Urban Growth Management—The Saudi Experience', examine in more detail the process used in devising urban limits and evaluate their impact on urban structures of Saudi Cities. The three papers make an interesting collection in that they use the same basic data to come up with quite different observations. We leave it to the readers of *Habitat International* to draw their own conclusions on the Riyadh situation from the case studies presented.

The final paper in this collection is by Mohammed Abdullah Eben Saleh, entitled 'Learning from Tradition: The Planning of Residential Neighborhoods in a Changing World'. Although this

paper focuses on the planning process in rural areas of southwestern Saudi Arabia, one cannot help but wonder if, given the need for a new form of planning, perhaps this ‘new urbanism’ is part of that solution.

The authors hope that this collection of studies will provide readers of *Habitat International* with new insights into the Middle East and the urbanization and transformation that is taking place.

## References

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Mohammed A. Eben Saleh  
*College of Architecture and Planning, King Saud University,*  
*P.O. Box 57448, Riyadh 11574, Saudi Arabia*  
*E-mail address: ebnsaleh@ksu.edu.sa*